



THE MEANING OF SIGNS



Notes



As you progress in ISL use and learn its grammar and structure, you will begin to figure out the meaning of signs in comparison to spoken language words. In this lesson, You will also learn how to categorise signs such as thinking, feeling, or money signs. In this lesson, we will also discuss the process that the deaf community uses to create new signs.



OUTCOMES

After studying this lesson, learner:

- identifies the meanings of signs and compare them with words from a spoken language;
- list signs into families, e.g. money signs, thinking signs, and feeling signs;
- describes how new signs are created by the deaf community.

11.1 FORM AND MEANING : ICONIC AND NON-ICONIC SIGNS

Some signs are iconic, i.e. their form is the same as their meaning. For example, the sign CAR is iconic.

Other signs are abstract, and not iconic. This means that their form is not the same as their meaning. For example, the sign POSSIBLE is not iconic.

- Examples of signs where form is related to meaning (Iconic):
 - ❖ SNAKE

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- ❖ LAPTOP
- ❖ TREE
- ❖ CHESS

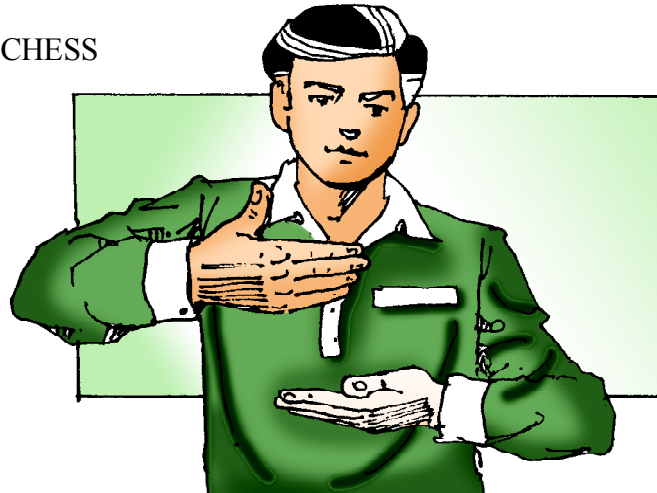


Figure-11.1 : Laptop

- Examples of signs where form is unrelated to meaning (Non-iconic):

- ❖ IMPOSSIBLE
- ❖ EASY

Signs which cannot be translated into a single word.

Some ISL signs have complicated meanings and cannot be translated with one word.

There are some signs that cannot be translated directly into one single English or Hindi word, and need a description. Examples:

- GET-STUCK-WITH-SOMETHING
- TWIST-A-STORY
- MAKE-UP-SOMETHING-UNFOUNDED

Group discussion activity

There are many more such signs, which are difficult to translate into one single word. Working with your peers, find more such signs and write their glosses below:



INTEXT QUESTIONS 11.1

1. What is the difference between Iconic and Non-iconic signs?
2. Give four examples of Iconic signs.
3. Give four examples of Non-iconic signs.
4. Give two examples of signs in ISL which cannot be translated into a single word in English.
5. Identify if the following are Iconic or Non-iconic signs.
 - a. GRAMMER
 - b. BOTTLE
 - c. CHALK
 - d. BOOK
 - e. EXAMPLE
 - f. UNDERSTAND



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11.2 SIGN FAMILIES

Signs can be classified on the basis of their location or position on the body. Examples:

Signs related to thinking (head level)

- FORGET
- THINK
- REMEMBER
- WORRY

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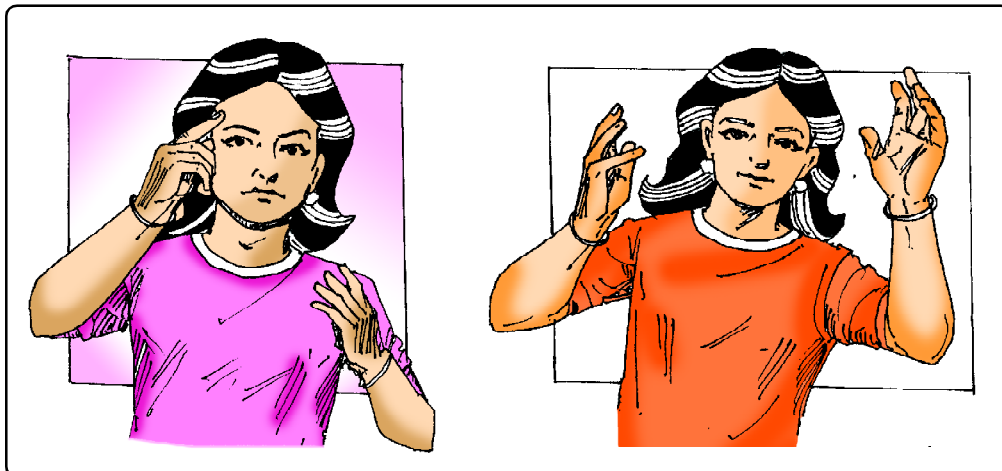


Figure-11.2 : Worry

Signs related to feeling (chest level)

- HAPPY
- SAD
- ENJOY
- SHOCK

Signs related to communication (mouth level)

- INFORM
- TELL
- COMPLAIN
- SING

Signs related to money

- RICH
- PAY
- EXPENSIVE
- CHEAP

Group discussion activity

Discuss this with your peers and think of more sign families.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 11.2

1. Circle the odd one out based on sign families:
 - a. HAPPY, SAD, FORGET, ANGRY
 - b. RICH, THINK, REMEMBER, WORRY
 - c. SAY, TELL, COMPLAIN, PAY
 - d. CHEAP, SHOCK, EXPENSIVE, MONEY

11.3 CREATING NEW SIGNS

New signs are constantly being created by deaf people and introduced into the deaf community. There are four different processes they can use:

1. Explain the meaning

One process of creating new signs is through explaining the meaning.

1. WATER + RISE UP = FLOOD
2. WATER+SUN+RISE = EVAPORATION

2. Describe the shape or the action

Another way of creating new signs is by describing the shape of the object or the action it involves.

1. MOUSE
2. HEARING-AID
3. TRIPOD
4. MIC
5. CCTV-CAMERA

3. General concept + specific concept

The third process for creating new signs is to combine the sign for a general concept (e.g. 'world') with a sign for a specific concept ('places in the world').



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1. WORLD + PLACES = COUNTRIES
2. INDIA + PLACES = STATES
3. LAW + PLACE = COURT
4. Fingerspelled letter + sign

Sometimes, a new sign is created by fingerspelling the initial letter of a word.

1. AMAZON
2. NETFLIX
3. YOUTUBE



Figure-11.3

AMAZON



Figure-11.4

YOUTUBE

ISL is a beautiful and creative language that is constantly evolving all the time, e.g. to

express concepts related to new technology. Earlier, many signs were based on gestures and lengthy explanations. We are seeing shorter signs. This is a natural process in any spoken or signed language.

It is not reasonable to believe that English, Hindi, or other spoken languages are superior to or more rich than ISL. As we have seen there are some terms in ISL that are not found in English or Hindi.

It is not a good idea to say that one language is better than another language. All languages are equal, and have their own development process. Both spoken and signed languages have the ability to carry abstract concepts and express complex ideas.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 11.3

7. Match the following ways of creating new signs with the signs.
- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|
| a. Explain the meaning | i. AMAZON |
| b. Describe the shape or the action | ii. COUNTRIES |
| c. General concept + specific concept | iii. FLOOD |
| d. Fingerspelled letter + sign | iv. CCTV camera |



WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

- Some signs are iconic (e.g. CAR, SLEEP, TREE : form of the sign resembles the meaning) and some signs of ISL are abstract or non-iconic (e.g. EASY, IMPOSSIBLE)
- In ISL, there are certain signs that cannot be translated into a single English or Hindi word and need explanation e.g. TWIST IN STORY
- Based on the location or position on the body, signs can be classified into: Thinking signs like WORRY, THINK, FORGET (head level). Signs like HAPPY, SAD, ENJOY related to feelings and emotions(at chest level) and signs related to communication e.g. INFORM, TELL, COMPLAIN etc.(mouth level)
- Deaf people use many strategies to create new signs. One approach is to explain meaning: signs of FLOOD (WATER+ RISE UP) and EVAPORATION (WATER+SUN+RISE) are created like this.



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- Shape of the object or action involved can also be used to create new signs. E.g. MIC, MOUSE, HEARING AID etc.
- Signs of words like COUNTRIES (WORLD+ PLACES), STATES (INDIA+ PLACES) or COURT (LAW+PLACE) are created by combining a general concept with a specific concept.
- Some new signs are created by using the first finger spelled letter of word. E.g. AMAZON, YOUTUBE etc.
- The same way new words are added to spoken languages overtime, new signs are being added to ISL.
- All languages are equal and it is wrong to say English/Hindi is better than ISL or ASL is better than ISL.



TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. Give two examples each of iconic and non-iconic signs.
2. Think of one example of a sign that cannot be translated in a single word.
3. Provide two examples of following sign families:
 - a) Signs related to thinking (head level)
 - b) Signs related to feeling (chest level)
 - c) Signs related to communication (mouth level)
 - d) Signs related to money
4. Illustrate how we create new signs by:
 - a) Explaining the meaning
 - b) Describing shape / action
 - c) General concept + specific concept
 - d) Fingerspelled letter + Sign
5. Explain the concept of sign families. Give four examples of sign families.
6. Explain any three processes to create new sign with examples.



ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

11.1

1. Iconic Signs: When form is the same as their meaning.

Non Iconic Signs: When form is not the same as their meaning and signs are abstract.

2. SNAKE, LAPTOP, TREE, APPLE
3. POSSIBLE, EXAMPLE, EXPLAIN, EASY
4. GET-STUCK-WITH-SOMETHING ; TWIST-A-STORY
5. a. Non-Iconic
b. Iconic
c. Iconic
d. Iconic
e. Non-iconic
f. Non-iconic

11.2

1. a. FORGET
b. RICH
c. PAY
d. SHOCK
2. a. - iii
b. - iv
c. - ii
d. - i



Notes

MODULE -4

Creative Expressions in ISL

This interesting module will make you feel proud to be deaf. How creative, talented and expressive you and your other deaf friends may be. Talking about ISL stories, jokes, poems, theatre, mime and drama will help you to know and develop your own specific talent and skill. We have world famous deaf artists and as opportunities and awareness grow, very soon Indian deaf artists, story tellers, actors, poets and dancers will rise and shine. This module will help you know and understand details about these creative expressions and also develop your skills.

This module will cover the following lessons:

12. Stories
13. Poems and songs
14. Jokes and humour
15. Mime and drama
16. Newsreading
17. Sign language in social media